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In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOVEMBER 11, 2009

ONTARIO ANIMAL HEALTH ACT RAISES QUESTIONS

“Could the provincial government’s *Animal Health Act* shut down organic livestock production in Ontario? Given the experience of certified organic turkey production, that is a real worry,” says National Farmers Union (NFU) Ontario Coordinator Grant Robertson. “Getting this legislation right should be the priority for this government, not rushing it through.”

Robertson was reacting to the news that the Ontario government has begun to limit debate on the *Animal Health Act* in the Legislature. But even more troubling is that only one half-day has been allocated for consultation, and that is set for November 25th in the heart of downtown Toronto – far away from Ontario’s farm communities.

The NFU, like Ontario’s farmers, supports the principles this bill is based upon. For farmers in Ontario, human and animal health is top priority. “This is particularly true for the NFU as many of our members sell directly to eaters in local markets,” stated Robertson.

“Under spurious animal health claims, the Turkey Farmers of Ontario effectively eliminated certified organic turkey production in Ontario for farmers with more than 50 birds through their regulatory powers,” said Robertson. “Farmers worry that we could see similar things happening with a variety of livestock, where providing natural, healthy outside access is a major part of the raising of that livestock.”

The NFU is also concerned about other provisions of the Act including;

1. Compensation for farmers is discretionary, meaning that farmers could potentially have their livelihoods devastated if animals are ordered to be destroyed – a common precautionary action. This could create a situation where well-meaning farmers might be afraid to come forward with disease concerns
2. The cost implications of the licensing and fees the Act will create for farmers, especially for small and beginning farms. Because of the way food is sold and marketed, there is simply no mechanism for farmers to recoup these costs from the marketplace as there would be in other businesses.

3. A new regulatory regime may need to be created for farmers that currently fall outside the supply-managed inspection criteria. As an example: someone raising 300 chickens in Ontario for local consumption does not have to comply with all the regulatory burden a larger chicken operation now must. Will a new layer of red tape be created between Ontario's eaters and Ontario's farmers?

“There is simply no good case for rushing through this Act and risk getting things wrong,” said Robertson. Limiting consultation to a few short hours in Toronto on an Act that could have profound implications for a large number of Ontario's farmers just makes no sense if your goal, as it should be, is to make sure this Act does not create more animal and human health problems than it is intended to address, along with even greater financial burdens for Ontario's farmers.”

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